

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 0302

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PGOV, PINT, PINR, TH

SUBJECT: PROVINCIAL CAMPAIGN CLOSE-UP: NAKHON SI THAMMARAT PROVINCE

REF: SONGKHLA A-2

BEGIN SUMMARY: NAKHON SI THAMMARAT WILL HAVE EIGHT SEATS IN THE NEW PARLIAMENT, ALMOST ONE-FOURTH OF SOUTH THAILAND'S TOTAL REPRESENTATION. THE DEMOCRATS LOOK STRONG, BUT SOME OF THE OTHER PARTIES ARE ALSO RUNNING YOUNG AGGRESSIVE CANDIDATES AND MAY PREVENT A DEMOCRATIC SWEEP. THE UN-SEASONALLY LATE START OF THE RAINS ALLOWED THE CAMPAIGN TO SEEP INTO MORE ISOLATED AREAS. THE TORRENTS WHICH NOW FLOOD THE SOUTH WILL UPSET MANY A CAMPAIGN SCHEDULE AND COULD MAKE THE OUTCOME MORE UNPREDICTABLE. END SUMMARY.

1. NAKHON SI THAMMARAT IS THE LARGEST PROVINCE IN THE SOUTH, WITH A POPULATION, AS OF SEPTEMBER 1974, OF OVER 1,100,000. ITS 477,396 ELIGIBLE VOTERS ARE DIVIDED INTO THREE ELECTORAL DISTRICTS WHICH WILL RETURN EIGHT REPRESENTATIVES TO THE PARLIAMENT, AN INCREASE OF TWO OVER 1969. NAKHON SI THAMMARAT, THEREFORE, CONTROLS ALMOST ONE-FOURTH OF THE 33 SEATS FROM SOUTHERN THAILAND.
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2. APPROXIMATELY 50 CANDIDATES HAVE REGISTERED TO RUN IN NAKHON. THIRTY CANDIDATES RAN IN 1969. APPROXIMATELY 10 OF THIS YEAR'S CANDIDATES RAN IN THE 1969 ELECTIONS. TWO OF THE PREVIOUS DEMOCRAT PARTY WINNERS, INCLUDING THE HIGHEST VOTE GETTER, ARE NOT RUNNING IN THE PRESENT CONTEST; THREE ARE. THIS SITUATION, IN ADDITION TO AN INCREASE OF TWO SEATS, LEAVES FOUR SLOTS WITHOUT PREVIOUS WINNERS IN THE COMPETITION, THEREBY INCREASING THE CHANCES FOR NEWCOMERS. THE RESULT IS AN ACTIVE CAMPAIGN, WITH ONLY VAGUELY PREDICTABLE RESULTS.

3. NAKHON SI THAMMARAT VOTERS GENERALLY TAKE A JAUNDICED VIEW OF BANGKOK AND NATIONAL POLITICS. THE DEMOCRATS WON ALL BUT ONE OF THE SIX SEATS IN 1969 ON THE BASIS OF THEIR IMAGE AS THE MAIN OPPOSITION TO THE BANGKOK GOVERNMENT. THE DEMOCRATS ARE AGAIN TRYING TO PIN THE TAG OF OLD-REGIME ON CANDIDATES FROM THE FORMER UNITED THAI PEOPLE'S PARTY (UTPP) WHO HAVE FOUND HOMES IN THE THAI NATION, SOCIAL AGRARIAN, SOCIAL JUSTICE, OR SOCIAL NATIONALIST PARTIES. THIS IS PROBABLY THE SINGLE IDENTIFIABLE ISSUE INFLUENCING THE ELECTION IN NAKHON. PERSONALITY, HOWEVER, IS THE PREDOMINANT INFLUENCE.

4. THE CANDIDATES HAVE TAKEN CONSIDERABLE PAINS TO GET OUT INTO REMOTE VILLAGES AND INTRODUCE THEMSELVES. THE DELAY IN THE START OF THE RAINY SEASON HAS BROUGHT THE CAMPAIGN TO THESE MORE ISOLATED AREAS. TORRENTIAL RAINS HAVE NOW COME WITH A VENGEANCE AND FLOODING HAS CUT THE CANDIDATES OFF FROM VILLAGERS IN SOME AREAS. HARDEST HIT ARE LAN SAKA, RON PHIBUN, AND CHA-UAT DISTRICTS. NEWSPAPER REPORTS AFTER TWO DAYS OF STRONG RAINS SAY THAT 35 HAVE DIED IN LAN SAKA DISTRICT ALONE.

5. ELECTION DISTRICT ONE INCLUDES MUANG, LAN SAKA, THASALA, SICHON, AND KHANON DISTRICTS, AND PHONHONSIRI SUB-DISTRICT. VETERAN DEMOCRAT PARLIAMENTARIAN SURIN MATDIT HEADS THE TICKET AND SHOUKLS WIN EASILY. THE OTHER TWO DEMOCRATS ARE YOUNG MEN RUNNING FOR THE FIRST TIME. THE DEMOCRATS HAVE A GOOD CHANCE OF SWEEPING ALL THREE SEATS. THE CONSUL IN SONGKHLA SEES A POSSIBILITY, HOWEVER, CONFIDENTIAL

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OF THE YOUNG AND ENERGETIC NEW FORCE PARTY CANDIDATE, KOMSAN PHONGSUTTHEM, DRAWING OFF SOME DEMOCRAT VOTES SO THAT HE OR THAI NATION CANDIDATE, CHO CHUEPHET PHEPHAISIT, COULD GAIN THE THIRD SEAT. CHUEPHET'S FATHER WAS HEAD OF THE PROVINCIAL COUNCIL AND THE FAMILY NAME IS WELL KNOWN.

6. ELECTION DISTRICT TWO INCLUDES RON PHIBUN, THUNG SONG, CHAWANG, AND THUNG YAI DISTRICTS, AND PHIPHUN SUB-DISTRICT.

DEMOCRATS SEEM TO BE WEAKEST IN DISTRICT TWO. CHOP PHARA, WHO SCORED THE THIRD HIGHEST NUMBER OF VOTES IN 1969, LEADS THE TICKET. THE THAI NATION CANDIDATES, WONG RITHAKON AND WORASAK ADITHEPWORAPHAN, ARE STRONG CANDIDATES. WONG ONLY LOST BY EIGHT VOTES IN THE 1969 ELECTIONS AND IS A CANTON HEADMAN IN THUNG SONG DISTRICT. BOTH HE AND WORASAK, SON OF A LATE PHILANTHROPIC MILLION-AIRE, HAVE THE PERSONAL FORTUNES REQUIRED FOR A TOUGH CAMPAIGN. THE SOCIAL ACTION PARTY IS RUNNING FORMER CHAWANG DISTRICT OFFICER, POLICE LIEUTENANT RABIN NANAKUN. HE HAS A GOOD REPUTATION IN THE AREA AND MAY SIPHON OFF SOME OF THE DEMOCRAT VOTE.

7. ELECTION DISTRICT THREE INCLUDES PAKPHANANG, CHIANG YAI, HUA SAI, AND CHA-UAT DISTRICTS. THIS IS A STRONG DEMOCRAT AREA WHERE A FORMER WINNER, MANAT SUWANNARAT, HEADS THE TICKET. MANAT PLACED FOURTH IN 1969. HIS RUNNING MATE IS SOEM MUSIKAWAT, RUNNING FOR THE FIRST TIME. THE DEMOCRATS COULD SWEEP THE DISTRICT. THERE IS NO COMPETITION FROM THE REMAKES OF THE UTPP. THE NEW FORCE, HOWEVER, IS RUNNING SOMNUK KETCHAT, THE EDITOR OF THE SOUTH'S BIGGEST CIRCULATION NEWSPAPER. HE IS RUNNING IN HIS HOMETOWN AND HAS RECEIVED HELP FROM LOCAL STUDENTS.

8. COMMENT: WITH ONLY THREE WEEKS LEFT IN THE CAMPAIGN THE DEMOCRATS APPEAR TO HAVE A FIRM GRASP ON THE MAJORITY OF THE SEATS FROM NAKHON SI THAMMARAT. THE DEMOCRATS, WHO ARE RUNNING NEWCOMERS IN TANDEM WITH FORMER WINNERS, MAY PULL OFF A NEAR SWEEP. THE POSSIBILITY REMAINS THAT ENERGETIC NEWCOMERS MAY BE ABLE TO SLIP AWAY FROM THE STAIN WHICH THE DEMOCRATS WISH TO ATTACH TO THE REMAKES OF THE UTPP, AND TAKE A COUPLE OF SEATS.

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9. RURAL AREAS HAVE THE BULK OF THE VOTE; MOST OF THE FORMER PARLIAMENTARIANS' POWER BASES ARE IN THE RURAL AREAS. THE RECENT EXTENSIVE FLOODING, HOWEVR, MAY DISRUPT RURAL VOTING AND GIVE NAKHON'S URBAN AREAS, WHERE THE SINO-THAI ARE CONCENTRATED, MORE INFLUENCE. THE FLOODINGS ALSO GIVE THE CANDIDATES AN OPPORTUNITY FOR SHOWY ELECTIONEERING IF THEY GO IN FOR RELIEF WORK. IF THE URBAN VOTE BECOMES SIGNIFICANT, THE RESULTS COULD FAVOR THE DEMOCRATS AND NEW FORCE. THE THAI NATION CANDIDATES HAVE MONEY AND COULD INCREASE THEIR POPULARITY THROUGH RELIEF WORK. THE FLOODING THUS MIGHT DAMPEN THE CHANCES OF THE RURAL CONSERVATIVE CANDIDATES AND THE POORLY FINANCED HOPEFULS ON THE LEFT.

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